

Approved For Release 2010/01/08 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000301390006-8

*Variation of the WETA Radio
Coverage of President Regan's
~~speech~~ remarks.*

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RADIO TV REPORTS, INC.

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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Morning Edition

STATION WAMU-FM
NPR Network

DATE September 28, 1984 9:00 AM

CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Damage to the Intelligence Agencies

BOB EDWARDS: The White House says the news media have distorted President Reagan's remarks made earlier this week in which he seemed to suggest that the Carter Administration bore some blame for last week's bombing of the American Embassy in Beirut.

Without mentioning Carter by name, the President said our nation's ability to carry out intelligence operations have been all but crippled before he took office.

THE PRESIDENT: We're feeling the effects today of the near destruction of our intelligence capability in recent years. Before we came here, the effort that somehow to say that spying is somehow dishonest and let's get rid of our intelligence agency -- we did that to a large extent.

EDWARDS: President Reagan added that without sound intelligence it's difficult to have real protection against such terrorist attacks.

After the speech, aides said the President was indeed referring to the Carter Administration. But now, presidential spokesman Larry Speakes says those aides didn't know what they were talking about. He says Reagan was not referring to Carter, but a decade-long lack of funding for intelligence agencies.

NPR's David Molpus reports.

DAVID MOLPUS: Democrats in Congress leaped on the

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President's remarks, accusing him of trying to escape responsibility for the Beirut bombings. To attempt to blame Jimmy Carter, said Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, is shameful.

New York's Patrick Moynihan called it ghastly. An apology is in order, he said.

Admiral Stansfield Turner, CIA Director under President Carter was among the most livid.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: I mean, this is a blatant effort in an election campaign to say that the Democrats hurt intelligence and the Republicans are helping it.

MOLPUS: Turner says President Reagan has had plenty of time to make any improvements he wants in intelligence gathering, and he says Reagan, not Carter, has done more damage to the CIA than any President in history.

ADMIRAL TURNER: He's done it because he has politicized it, because he's appointed people with questionable ethical standards, and because he's lowered the reputation of the CIA throughout our country.

In the Carter Administration, we did not reduce one intelligence operative overseas. We reduced only bureaucratic overhead in Washington.

MOLPUS: Ray Cline, who was Deputy Director of the CIA in the mid-'60s, says Turner is wrong. There is sound basis for Reagan's statement. Cline says the Carter Administration did diminish human intelligence capabilities when they fired some 800 CIA officials. Some of them, Cline says, were key figures in directing the Agency's overseas intelligence network. He says Reagan has changed that.

RAY CLINE: You don't build an intelligence net in a short period of time. You only begin to turn it around in three years. Actually, it took about 15 or 20 years to build up, and you won't get it cheap again nor quickly, and that's exactly the situation we're in.

MOLPUS: Stansfield Turner says that's totally erroneous.

ADMIRAL TURNER: What's happened is not due to the Carter Administration, but due to the march of American technology. By the mid-1970s, technically collected intelligence had become increasingly important -- satellites and electronic listening, and so on.

That did not mean, however, that human intelligence was less important, and there was no de-emphasis whatsoever on human intelligence.

MOLPUS: Instead of decreasing the CIA budget, as happened during the Ford Administration when George Bush was running the Agency, President Carter supported steady increases.

And Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy says the Beirut problem was not faulty intelligence given to Mr. Reagan.

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: His own intelligence community told him that that embassy was in danger of being bombed in Beirut. His own people told him that there should be beefed-up security. Instead, the security wasn't beefed-up. It was left incomplete.

The fact is they didn't take the security steps that their own intelligence service told them to, and a number of people died.

MOLPUS: Yesterday, the White House reiterated its view that there is no fail safe security against terrorists on a suicide mission, and the Administration still asserts that the decision to move the embassy in Beirut was a sound one, even through security preparations were not complete.

I'm David Molpus, in Washington.